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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: ASSESSMENT OF ANTI-DRUG CHECKPOINTS

¶1. Summary: From November 24 through December 4, a joint UNODC/INL team and an independent expert assessed six internal ("Rubezh") checkpoints. The international expert will provide a report with recommendations to the donor community and the GoK in January, including proposals for training and equipment. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. INL provided a grant to UNODC in July 2007 to support the Ministry of Internal Affairs' (MVD) efforts to strengthen controls on primary narco-trafficking routes and to help improve national and regional law enforcement capacities along these routes through the provision of communications and other equipment. As part of its Counter Narcotics Strategy, the GOK provided 1.5 billion tenge (approximately \$12.5 million) for first-stage implementation of the strategy from 2006 to 2008. With a portion of the funding, the MVD's Committee on Combating Drugs established seven internal checkpoints ("Rubezh-Narkotiki") including the Ulken post in the Almaty oblast, Syrdarya post in the Kyzylorda oblast, Kyzyltu post in the South-Kazakhstan oblast, Kargaly post in the Aktobe oblast, Ayagoz post in the Eastern Kazakhstan oblast, and Leninskiy post in Pavlodar in 2005. The Sary-Arka post was established in the Karaganda oblast in November 2007. MVD provided infrastructure and drug identification equipment. INL will provide training of officers working at the Rubezh checkpoints.

¶3. In 2006, MVD seized a total of 126 kilos of narcotics at all seven posts, and approximately 125 kilos in the first 10 months of this year. The Ulken post has had the best results with 115 kilos seized during the first 10 months of this year. MVD seized 21.119 kilos of heroin in 2006, including 15.504 kilos at the Kyzyltu post, five kilos at Ulken in the Almaty oblast and 1.804 kilos at Syrdarya in the Kyzylorda oblast. In the first ten months of this year, 7.678 kilos of heroin were seized at all posts.

¶4. Hardy Roehlung, an international expert from the EU Border Management in Central Asia Program, was contracted by UNODC to assess the internal checkpoints to determine checkpoint capacity, assess needs for specialized technical equipment, and recommend needed training programs. Representatives of the Embassy's INL Office, the UN Office of Drug Control (UNODC), and the MVD joined the assessment mission.

¶5. Generally, the posts are independent subdivisions of the Committee on Combating Drug Trafficking and are directly subordinate to the oblasts' Divisions on Combating Drug Trafficking. They have the same organizational structure as the divisions, which include counter-narcotics operations officers, migration police, canine specialists, and road police. There are usually two officers who patrol the area adjacent to the post to counter the threat of drug

couriers bypassing posts. Though posts are theoretically located in areas without detour roads, the assessment showed that there are possibilities to avoid the posts by driving on secondary roads or off-road. On average there are 18 officers working in two or three shifts. Some posts have satellite phones, some have trunk telephone lines, and the rest use their own cellular phones. There is not appropriate infrastructure and equipment to communicate with the regional MVD offices or between checkpoints at longer distances. While some posts have access to the MVD databases, some are limited in their functions and others do not even have electricity. The assessment team also found that there are not sufficient personnel assigned to the checkpoints. Some officers are working for 24 hours straight.

ULKEN

16. The first post visited is located in Almaty oblast, 371 kilometers from Almaty on the main road to Astana. The post received INL-provided inspection equipment and a hangar for searching vehicles in 2005-2006. The GOK provided infrastructure. The local rural district administration provides assistance to the post because the work of the post and the presences of police ensure security in the area. The post is well equipped, but living conditions for the officers should be improved.

SYRDARYA

17. The post is located 8 kilometers from Kyzylorda on the main road between Shymkent and Samara. The post focuses on trucks and buses coming from Uzbekistan. Post personnel have a very good

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relationship with other agencies, including Customs, Border Guard Service and the local police. During its visit, the assessment team saw several border guards at the post who were sent from the closest border guard posts to strengthen the post's work during Operation Barrier. The Committee for National Security (KNB) first launched the operation in 2003 with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Customs Control Committee, Financial Police and Border Guard Service. The operation proved to be effective and has since been conducted several times each year. The officers working at the post use drug profiling techniques and canines. Twenty minutes before the assessment team arrived, a canine detected eight kilos of hashish on a bus and officers arrested the courier.

KYZYLTU

18. The checkpoint is located 58 km from Shymkent on the main road from Almaty to Tashkent and Termez, Uzbekistan. During the assessment team's visit to the post, the head of the post presented a plan for a model Rubezh post that will include an administrative building, a hangar, a dormitory, and dog kennels. The model post also would have an access road to the hangar, sufficient lighting, barriers, and other necessary equipment. Unfortunately, the present situation at the post is quite the opposite. The inspection hangar, which was built with GOK funds, was shoddily constructed and appears ready to collapse. MVD has complained that none of the six hangars constructed with their funds in 2006 meet minimal safety requirements and the MVD is currently taking legal action against the contractor.

19. MVD officers stated that the biggest problem is with trucks operating under the TIR convention (The Convention on International Transport of Goods Under Cover of TIR Carnets), which MVD officers cannot inspect. If MVD receives intelligence information that a truck is carrying contraband, officers must ask the driver of the truck to drive 150 kilometers to a customs checkpoint on the Kazakhstani-Uzbek border to inspect the truck with a fixed x-ray machine. Drivers can refuse and claim not to have sufficient fuel or time. Approximately 150 vehicles pass through the post daily,

including 30 trucks - 25 of which operate under the TIR convention. The post is the first on the route from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and must be strengthened. MVD plans to construct an administrative building and reconstruct the hangar for inspection of vehicles, but does not have sufficient funds to purchase fixed X-ray equipment.

AYAGOZ

¶10. The post is located 360 km from Semey city on the main road from Almaty to Semey. The location of the post is not effective because it is located 90 kilometers from a main route from China to Almaty. The majority of traffic passing through this checkpoint are fully loaded cargo trucks, which are difficult to examine. Though the post has modern equipment, officers are fearful of misusing or breaking the equipment and continue to use traditional drug profiling techniques and dogs in searching vehicles.

KARGALY

¶11. The post is located 4 kilometers from the customs checkpoint on the main road from Aktobe to Orsk, Russia. One of the officers believed that a better location for the post is in Karabutak. The post is ill equipped; there is no infrastructure or buildings; and the living and working conditions are very poor. The traffic volume at this post is low.

SARY-ARKA

¶12. The checkpoint is located outside of the city of Karaganda on the main road from Almaty to Astana. The post was relocated from the Arasan checkpoint in Atbasar. Due to the implementation of the "Astana - Drug-Free City" program to reduce demand, treat addiction, and fight drug trafficking and with the aim of creating a barrier around Astana, the MVD relocated the post to a city much closer to Astana. The head of the post pointed out the number of trucks with a TIR carnet passing through the checkpoint.

LENINSKIY

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¶13. The MVD established the Leninskiy post outside of the small town of Shiderty in the Pavlodarskaya oblast. The assessment team did not visit the post because UNODC and INL did not receive an official request to provide assistance to the post. However, the MVD colonel accompanying the assessment team stated that this was an oversight and that the post should be assessed. INL will work with UNODC and the international expert to arrange an assessment trip in the future.

TIR ISSUES

¶14. Post personnel are unable to legally unseal and inspect the contents of vehicles with a TIR carnet because customs officers are not present. However, upon receipt of intelligence information, they do inspect vehicles with an X-ray machine when possible. There appear to be two possible solutions: the purchase and installation of X-ray machines or the assignment of customs officials to the checkpoints.

¶15. Article 5 of the TIR Convention stipulates that goods carried under the TIR procedure under seal shall not, as a general rule, be subject to examination at customs offices en route. However, customs authorities may, in exceptional cases and when irregularity is suspected, carry out an examination of the goods. There are clear advantages for the countries which entered this Convention.

TIR trucks avoid long delays at borders and physical inspection of goods in transit. However, police officers in Kazakhstan suspect that some of these trucks are carrying contraband goods or narcotics.

¶16. In addition to the TIR trucks, officers at the checkpoints also face the difficulty of searching fully loaded trucks. There is not enough manpower to unload the cargo, search the truck, and reload the cargo in a timely manner. Such procedures could unduly delay shipments traveling to, from, and through Kazakhstan.

NEXT STEPS

¶17. The issue of strengthening the internal checkpoints will be raised at the next Counter Narcotics Donor Coordination Meeting in January, where we hope to find additional funds from other donors. Currently, INL does not have sufficient funds to cover the needs of the posts. In addition, the MVD will also receive the assessment and have an opportunity to address the deficiencies at the checkpoints. Only by joining forces will it be possible to sufficiently strengthen these checkpoints.

ORDWAY